



# INFORMATION CAPSULE

## Research Services

Vol. 1704  
April 2018

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## HISTORY OF EDUCATIONAL REFORM IN THE STATE OF FLORIDA

### At a Glance

This Information Capsule summarizes the history of educational reform in the State of Florida from the 1970s through the present. Although the Florida Legislature has modified accountability policies and added new reforms over the years, the *A+ Plan for Education*, signed into law by Governor Jeb Bush in 1999, remains the foundation of Florida's education system in 2018. This report reviews Florida's four different sets of student academic standards and their corresponding statewide assessments since 1976. A brief history of Florida's School Performance Grading system is also provided. Finally, Florida's teacher performance pay policy is summarized.

No state in the U.S. has a longer history of using accountability and assessment as a reform strategy than the State of Florida. Florida was the first state to require annual testing of every student in selected grades and subjects every year, and the first state to attach high stakes to test results.

Between 1970 and 1999, Florida enacted a series of accountability initiatives into law:

- The *1971 Educational Accountability Act* authorized Florida's Commissioner of Education to create a plan for objectively evaluating the effectiveness of educational programs and developing the methods necessary to assess students' academic progress. The 1971 Act established uniform statewide educational objectives for each grade level and subject area and required the development and administration of a statewide assessment.
- The *1974 Educational Accountability Act* called for all students to be tested in reading, writing, and mathematics by 1976. The Act also required that test results be reported for each school and provided to all parents.
- The *Educational Accountability Act of 1976* revised the 1974 Act to require testing of students in grades 3, 5, 8, and 11 and added a high school exit exam at grade 11.
- In 1991, the State Legislature enacted *Blueprint 2000*, an accountability initiative that returned the responsibility for education to local schools, teachers, and parents. The Legislature's intent was that the State would no longer dictate to schools and districts the processes and programs to be followed. Instead, schools were required to create their

own school improvement plans, which detailed the strategies and initiatives schools would implement to make progress toward achieving the State's educational goals.

- In 1995, the state released a list of schools designated as “critically low.” Schools deemed to be performing at critically low levels were required to develop improvement plans. The following year, the State substituted the designation of “critically low” with a five-point numerical rating system, based on student achievement on state assessments, as well as additional factors such as attendance rates, performance of subgroups of students, and incidence of school disciplinary infractions.
- In June 1999, Governor Jeb Bush signed Florida's *A+ Plan for Education* into law. The *A+ Plan* expanded state testing and assigned schools A-F grades based on their performance on standardized tests. High-performing schools were rewarded for their accomplishments and low-performing schools were provided with extra help in order to increase their students' academic achievement. In addition, students enrolled in chronically failing schools were given the choice to attend higher performing schools.

Although the Florida Legislature has continued to modify accountability policies and add new reforms, the core of the *A+ Plan* remains the foundation of Florida's education system in 2018. The *A+ Plan* is comprised of (1) student academic standards and (2) school performance grades, which reflect the state's efforts to increase performance at the district, school, and student levels and to provide information to the public about school and student performance. This paper addresses these two components, in addition to teacher accountability.

## **Student Academic Standards and Corresponding Statewide Assessments**

Student academic standards reflect the expectations of what students should know and be able to do as they progress from kindergarten through twelfth grade. The State of Florida has had four broad sets of standards since 1976. Students' mastery of each set of standards has been measured by a different set of statewide assessments.

Over the years, the Florida Legislature has continued to raise the stakes of its statewide assessments. Student test results are currently linked to school performance grades and teacher bonuses, as explained later in this report. Test scores are also tied to high school graduation requirements, third grade retention, and school choice:

- Florida's third graders are required to achieve a Level 2 score on the English language arts (ELA) portion of the state assessment or provide evidence of reading skill in order to be promoted to the fourth grade. [Some third graders who do not receive a proficient score on the state assessment can be exempted from the retention requirement and promoted to fourth grade. This is called a good cause exemption. Examples of good cause exemptions include English language learners who have had less than two years of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) instruction and students who demonstrate an acceptable level of performance on a state-approved alternative standardized reading or ELA assessment.]
- Florida students are required to pass state tests in ELA and mathematics in order to be eligible to receive a high school diploma. [Students who fail the required tests on their first attempt are provided with additional opportunities to pass them prior to graduation;

students can also meet the assessment graduation requirement by receiving a concordant score on a college entrance examination.]

- The Opportunity Scholarship Program was created as a Florida school choice option that allowed students who attended a failing public school to choose a higher performing public school or a participating private school. In January 2006, the Florida Supreme Court issued a ruling declaring the private school option unconstitutional. Therefore, students assigned to a failing school are no longer offered the opportunity to transfer to a participating private school. The option to attend a higher performing public school remains in effect.

### **Minimum Student Performance Standards**

The *Educational Accountability Act of 1976* led to the creation of Minimum Student Performance Standards (MSPS). The MSPS were adopted by the State Board of Education in 1977. A revised set of MSPS was adopted by the State Board of Education in 1979, although implementation of the new standards was postponed until the 1985-1986 school year because of the *Debra P. v. Turlington* legal challenge (described below).

Students' mastery of the MSPS was measured by their performance on the State Student Assessment Test, Part I (SSAT-I) in reading, writing, and mathematics in grades 3, 5, 8, and 11. At grade 11, students took the SSAT-II (also based on the MSPS) in order to meet the requirements for high school graduation. During the 1980-1981 school year, administration of the SSAT-II was changed from grade 11 to grade 10 in order to provide students with a longer remediation period, as well as an additional opportunity to take the test.

SAT-II results were used for remediation purposes, but their use as a requirement for a high school diploma was postponed until 1985-1986 because of a legal challenge that began in 1978. In *Debra P. v. Turlington*, Florida students who failed the SSAT-II filed suit, claiming that the content of the test was not valid and that use of the test violated the Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, and the Equal Educational Opportunity Act because of its disparate racial impact on students. After an original ruling and a decision on appeal that the state of Florida could not use the SSAT-II test results for diploma sanctions, the Eleventh Circuit Court upheld the use of the test as a requirement for high school graduation three years later, in 1984.

In 1984, the SSAT-II was revised and renamed the High School Competency Test (HSCT). Passage of both the communications and mathematics sections of the HSCT was a requirement for high school graduation. The HSCT was based on the MSPS and students who did not pass the test on the first administration in grade 11 were provided with additional opportunities to take and pass the test.

### **Sunshine State Standards**

The Florida Department of Education developed the Sunshine State Standards (SSS) in all content areas in 1996. The SSS were intended to measure students' proficiency in rigorous world-class competencies, rather than the minimum competencies that had been represented by the earlier standards.

The Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) was a criterion-referenced assessment

that was designed to measure how well students mastered the skills and competencies included in the SSS. The FCAT was first administered statewide in Spring 1998 to students in grades 4, 8, and 10 in reading and in grades 5, 8, and 10 in mathematics. In the 2001-2002 school year, administration of the FCAT expanded to students in grades 3-10.

The Florida Writes! Assessment became part of the FCAT during the 2000-2001 school year, administered to students in grades 4, 8, and 10. An FCAT science subtest was added for students in grades 5, 8, and 11 in 2007. The grade 10 FCAT reading and mathematics subtests became the tests required for high school graduation, replacing the MSPS-based test, the HSCT, for the class of 2003. In addition to the assessments that measured students' mastery of the SSS, the state added a norm-referenced component to the FCAT, the Stanford-9, that was administered to all students in grades 3-10 beginning in the 1999-2000 school year.

FCAT reading, mathematics, and science results were reported in terms of Achievement Levels that ranged from Level 1 (lowest) to Level 5 (highest). Level 3 indicated satisfactory performance. Results for the FCAT writing were reported on a scale of 1 (lowest) to 6 (highest). The writing passing score varied over the years, but was usually a 3.0 or 3.5.

### **Next Generation Sunshine State Standards**

From 2007 through 2012, the Florida Department of Education developed the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards (NGSSS) in all content areas. The NGSSS provided new benchmarks to guide rigorous instruction and assessment to ensure that students were college and career ready. NGSSS benchmarks were more focused on higher order thinking skills than the SSS. They emphasized cognitive processes, analysis, technology, creativity, multi-faceted problem-solving, learning for transfer, and 21<sup>st</sup> century skills.

In order to assess students' mastery of the NGSSS, the Florida Department of Education developed the FCAT 2.0. Florida students took the FCAT 2.0 for the first time in Spring 2012. The FCAT 2.0 was characterized as a new, harder version of the FCAT that required students to remember more material they had learned in earlier grades. The FCAT 2.0 was administered to students in writing in grades 4, 8, and 10, in reading in grades 3-10, and in mathematics in grades 3-8. The FCAT 2.0 Science assessment for students in grades 5 and 8 was administered to students statewide for the first time in 2013. Reading, mathematics, and science scores were still reported in terms of five Achievement Levels, with Level 3 indicating satisfactory performance, and writing scores were still based on a 1 to 6 scoring scale.

Measurement of student proficiency on the NGSSS also included the addition of End-of-Course (EOC) assessments. EOC assessments are computer-based tests designed to measure student achievement of the specified standards for middle and high school level courses. NGSSS EOC assessments were administered in Algebra 1, Geometry, Biology 1, Civics, and U.S. History. The Algebra 1, Geometry, and Biology 1 EOC exams replaced comprehensive FCAT 2.0 mathematics and science testing at the secondary level.

NGSSS EOC exam scores represented 30% of students' final grade in the corresponding courses. In addition, beginning with students entering grade 9 in 2011-2012, students were required to take and pass the Algebra 1 EOC exam to satisfy the graduation requirement (in addition to the FCAT 2.0 ELA). NGSSS EOC assessment scores were reported in terms of five Achievement Levels, with Level 3 indicating satisfactory performance.

## **Florida Standards**

During the summer of 2011, the Florida State Board of Education joined states across the country in adopting the Common Core Standards for English language arts and mathematics. Shortly thereafter, however, educators and policymakers across the State began to voice concerns about federal overreach on state education systems and the Board decided to develop its own state standards. In 2014, the State made several changes to the Common Core Standards, such as adding calculus and cursive writing, and renamed them the Florida Standards (FS).

The State Board of Education adopted the FS in March 2014. Beginning with the 2014-2015 school year and continuing today, Florida's schools implement the FS in kindergarten through twelfth grade in language arts and mathematics. The FS are more rigorous than the NGSSS, which tended to feature large amounts of recall knowledge. In contrast, the FS feature increased complexity of texts, an increased focus on justifying and presenting results and methods, and a return to depth as opposed to breadth.

The Florida Standards Assessments (FSA), developed by the American Institutes for Research to replace the FCAT 2.0, was administered to Florida students for the first time in Spring 2015. The FSA assesses students' higher order thinking skills as related to the higher expectations of the FS. The tests include some traditional multiple-choice questions, but many questions now contain multimedia and interactivity (for example, audio questions, questions asking students to perform tasks, and questions asking students to complete several steps before arriving at an answer).

The FSA is administered in mathematics in grades 3-8 and in ELA in grades 3-10 (reading and language components in grades 3 through 10; writing and listening components in grades 4 through 10). The FCAT 2.0 science test is still administered to students in grades 5 and 8. As with the FCAT and FCAT 2.0, FSA results are reported in terms of Achievement Levels that range from level 1 (lowest) to Level 5 (highest). Level 3 indicates satisfactory performance.

Algebra 1 and Geometry NGSSS EOC exams were replaced with new FSA exams in 2015. The EOC exams in Biology 1, Civics, and U.S. History are still based on the NGSSS and have not yet been replaced with EOC assessments that measure mastery of the FS. (An FSA EOC exam in Algebra 2 was administered in 2015 through 2017, but then eliminated by state lawmakers.)

Currently, EOC exam scores represent 30% of students' final grade in the corresponding courses and students must pass the Algebra 1 EOC exam (in addition to the FSA ELA) to satisfy the graduation requirement. FSA and NGSSS EOC assessment scores are reported in terms of five Achievement Levels, with Level 3 indicating satisfactory performance.

## **School Performance Grades**

The 1999 *A+ Plan for Education* replaced the State's existing numerical (1-5) rating system with an alphabetical one (A-F), similar to student report card ratings. School Performance Grades were originally based on students' writing, reading, and mathematics test proficiency at a single point in time at the elementary, middle, and high school levels (grades 4/5, 8, and 10). In 2002, testing was expanded to include students in grades 3-10 in reading and mathematics, which provided the data needed to track student learning gains from one year to the next.

Florida's grading system has changed frequently over the years. Examples of revisions to the grading formula include:

- Each time State lawmakers have revised Florida's academic standards, they have adopted new statewide assessments and altered the school grading formula to match the results on the new test. For example, when the FCAT 2.0 replaced the FCAT in 2012, reading and mathematics results from the new assessment were integrated into the school grading formula; similarly, FSA reading and mathematics results were incorporated into the grading formula beginning in 2015.
- The State has continued to raise its expectations for student achievement. For example, only standard curriculum students were included in the calculation of the original School Performance Grades in 1999. In 2002, the formula was revised to include students who had been receiving ESOL services for *two* years or more. In 2012, the formula was changed to include students who had been receiving ESOL services for *one* year or more, and students with disabilities. The current grading formula took effect in 2015 and includes students who have been receiving ESOL services for *two* years or more, as well as students with disabilities.
- From 2010 to 2014, high schools were graded based on a different formula than elementary and middle schools. In addition to the assessment-based measures used to grade elementary and middle schools, up to 50% of high schools' performance grade was based on six other components, such as participation and performance in accelerated curricula, graduation rate, and college readiness. Each of the six additional components was worth between 100 and 200 points. The current high school grading formula took effect in 2015 and includes only two additional components, each worth 100 points – a graduation rate component and a college and career acceleration component. Middle school performance grades now include an acceleration component worth 100 points.
- In 2013, School Performance Grades dropped throughout the state and some experts blamed this on the large number of changes State education officials had made to the school grading formula. Critics of the State's grading system claimed that the formula had been changed so much that it had become unfairly punitive and was no longer statistically valid. State officials responded that they were simply "raising the bar" to ensure that students were fully prepared for college or a career. However, in response to the criticism, a "safety net" provision was added to the school grading system that prevented schools from dropping more than one letter grade from one year to the next. The safety net provision was in effect during the 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 school years. According to an analysis conducted by the Florida Department of Education, there would have been 262 "F" schools in Florida for the 2012-2013 school year without the safety net; with the safety net, that number fell to 107.

In 2018, School Performance Grades were comprised of up to 11 components: four achievement components, four learning gains components, a middle school acceleration component, as well as graduation rate and college and career acceleration components for high schools. Grades included the performance of students with disabilities and English language learners. (Students who have been receiving ESOL services for less than two years were

included in the learning gains, but not proficiency, components of the State's school grading formula.)

- Four achievement components: The percentage of students receiving a passing score on state assessments in ELA, mathematics, science, and social studies.
- Four learning gains components: The percentage of students achieving a learning gain from the prior year to the current year in ELA and mathematics, as well as learning gains for the lowest performing 25% of students in ELA and mathematics.
- Middle school acceleration: The percentage of students passing a high school level EOC assessment or industry certification.
- Graduation rate (for schools with students enrolled in grades 11 and 12): Based on an adjusted cohort of ninth grade students, the rate measures whether the students graduate within four years.
- College and career acceleration (for schools with students enrolled in grades 11 and 12): The percentage of graduates from the graduation rate cohort who earn a score on an acceleration examination (such as Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate) or a grade in a dual enrollment course that qualifies them for college credit or earn an industry certification.

Each component is worth up to 100 points in the overall school grade calculation. The number of points earned for each component is added together and divided by the total number of available points to determine the percentage of points earned. In addition, schools are required to test at least 95% of their students. The grading scale is as follows:

- A = 62% of points or greater;
- B = 54% to 61% of points;
- C = 41% to 53% of points;
- D = 32% to 40% of points; and
- F = 31% of points or less.

### **Teacher Accountability**

Florida lawmakers passed a performance pay policy in 2011, requiring that the most effective teachers earn the largest salary awards each year. The State Board of Education established that teacher evaluations were to be based on three major areas: student performance; instructional practice; and professional and job responsibilities. Although school districts are given discretion in the weight they may assign to each evaluation component, the State requires that the student performance component be "no less than one-third" of a teacher's evaluation.

In Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS), 34% of a teacher's evaluation is based on student performance; 50% is based on instructional practices (principal observations and evaluations); and 16% is based on professional responsibilities, such as conferences, trainings, and collaboration with colleagues.

Beginning in July 2011, evaluations of all Florida teachers differentiated among four levels of performance: Highly Effective; Effective; Needs Improvement (or Developing, if the teacher has

been teaching for fewer than three years); or Unsatisfactory. Teachers are terminated based on their evaluation ratings when they are:

- Rated Unsatisfactory for two consecutive years;
- Rated either Unsatisfactory or Needs Improvement for three consecutive years; or
- Rated Unsatisfactory for two out of three years.

The student performance component of teacher evaluations is based on student growth measures. Florida uses value-added model (VAM) scores to measure the contribution of the teacher to student learning growth, while controlling for factors that may affect student performance. VAM scores measure the difference in each student's actual performance on a statewide assessment from that student's expected performance, taking into account specific student and classroom factors that impact the learning process. Teachers' evaluations are tied to student learning growth, not student achievement, because it is assumed that all students can show academic progress no matter where they go to school.

Florida produces VAM scores for teachers in the following subjects and grade levels:

- ELA teachers in grades 4-10, based on the FSA ELA scores of their students;
- Mathematics teachers in grades 4-8, based on FSA mathematics scores; and
- Algebra 1 teachers in grades 8 and 9, based on Algebra 1 EOC assessment scores.

Prior to 2017, Florida required that all school districts base the student performance component of their teacher evaluations on State VAM scores. Beginning in 2017, however, this requirement was lifted and school districts may now select the student growth measure upon which to base their teacher evaluations.

The State also requires that school districts use a student growth measure to evaluate the performance of teachers of other subjects and grade levels. Since the State does not produce VAM scores for these teachers, districts are required to develop their own student growth measure. M-DCPS uses a district-developed VAM for teachers in the following subjects and grade levels:

- ELA teachers in grade 3, based on the FSA ELA scores of their students;
- Mathematics teachers in grade 3, based on FSA mathematics scores;
- Science teachers in grades 5 and 8, based on FCAT 2.0 Science scores;
- Kindergarten, first grade, and second grade reading and mathematics teachers, based on the Stanford Achievement Test;
- Geometry teachers in grades 8-10, based on FSA EOC assessment scores;
- Civics teachers in grade 7, based on NGSSS EOC assessment scores;
- Biology 1 teachers in grades 8-11, based on NGSSS EOC assessment scores;
- U.S. History teachers in grade 11, based on NGSSS EOC assessment scores;
- Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and Cambridge teachers, based on the respective program exams; and
- Exceptional student education teachers, based on Florida Standards Alternate Assessment scores.

Teachers who are rated as Highly Effective and Effective on their evaluations are eligible for awards through the *Florida Best and Brightest Teacher Scholarship Program*. The program,



updated by the Florida Legislature in 2017, makes three scholarships available to teachers in the amounts of \$6,000, \$1,200, and \$800.

- **\$6,000 Scholarship:** To be eligible for a scholarship in the amount of \$6,000, a classroom teacher must have achieved a composite score at or above the 80<sup>th</sup> percentile on either the SAT or ACT college entrance exam, based on the National Percentile Ranks in effect when the teacher took the test. The teacher must also have received a performance evaluation rating of Highly Effective in the school year immediately preceding the year in which the scholarship is awarded. Once the teacher is deemed eligible for this scholarship by the school district, the teacher remains eligible for as long as he/she remains employed by the district as a classroom teacher and receives an annual performance evaluation rating of Highly Effective.
- **\$1,200 Scholarship:** A teacher who is not eligible for the \$6,000 scholarship may be eligible for a \$1,200 scholarship. The \$1,200 scholarship is based solely on a teacher's performance evaluation and is not related to his/her score on the SAT or ACT. To receive the \$1,200 scholarship, a classroom teacher must receive a performance evaluation rating of Highly Effective in the school year immediately preceding the year in which the scholarship is awarded.
- **\$800 Scholarship:** A teacher who is not eligible for the \$6,000 or \$1,200 scholarships may be eligible for an \$800 scholarship. The \$800 scholarship is based solely on a teacher's performance evaluation and is not related to his/her score on the SAT or ACT. To be eligible for the \$800 scholarship, a classroom teacher must receive a performance evaluation rating of Effective in the school year immediately preceding the year in which the scholarship is awarded.

The scholarship amounts for teachers receiving a performance evaluation rating of Highly Effective are written into State Statute (\$6,000 and \$1,200), but the amount of the scholarship for Effective teachers is not guaranteed because it is specified in Florida Statutes as "up to \$800." The Statute states, "If the number of eligible classroom teachers under this subparagraph exceeds the total allocation, the department shall prorate the per-teacher scholarship amount."

### **Summary**

This Information Capsule summarized the history of educational reform in the State of Florida from the 1970s through the present. Although the Florida Legislature has modified accountability policies and added new reforms over the years, the *A+ Plan for Education*, signed into law by Governor Jeb Bush in 1999, remains the foundation of Florida's education system in 2018. The *A+ Plan* is comprised of student academic standards and school performance grades, which reflect the state's efforts to increase performance at the district, school, and student levels and to provide information to the public about school and student performance.

This report reviewed Florida's four different sets of student academic standards and their corresponding statewide assessments since 1976: the Minimum Student Performance Standards and the State Student Assessment Test; the Sunshine State Standards and the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT); the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards and the FCAT 2.0; and the Florida Standards and the Florida Standards Assessments.

A brief history of Florida's School Performance Grading system was provided and the components of the current grading formula were described. Florida's teacher performance pay policy, adopted in 2011, was also summarized, including the three components of teacher evaluations (student performance, instructional practice, and professional and job responsibilities) and the awards available to teachers rated as Highly Effective and Effective.

## **Resources**

### **Student Academic Standards and Statewide Assessments**

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